



Author of "The Cabin Window," "How It Worked," etc.

THE purple shadows were lengthening in the river valley. A pair of snow geese rose and flew up-stream, leaving on the silver sheen of water a long V-wake that broadened until it touched the bank on each side. The snow-girthed peak of Blanc Touxjours, around whose base the river coiled, was still yellow in the late sun. A small rainbow, "the eye of the buck," hung in a crescent over the mountain as a promise of another fair day of Indian Summer.

At the foot of Blanc Touxjours a hundred yards up from the river stood three tall, slender hemlocks. A slide of white silt soil had buried the surrounding thickets of aspen and clumps of black balsam; but the sturdier hemlocks still reared up straight and lonely. The middle tree had been lopped of branches to a height of half a hundred feet, only an umbrella-like top remaining. A little over a man's reach from the ground a rough slab bearing a knifed inscription was spiked to the bole.

A few minutes after the snow geese had gone up-stream, they came winging swiftly back around a bend two hundred yards above the lob-stick; and disappeared down the river. A minute later a canoe swung into view. Its lines were the deep-forest, half-mysterious lines of the Indian birch-bark. Two men dipped paddles in practised, easy unison, one of them sitting in the front while the other knelt Indian-fashion in the stern. The canoe glided left across the

river, touched directly beneath the lob-stick; and the pair clambered up the slope to the three trees.

One of them was a white man of forty, tall, angular, and weathered. His manner was as deliberate as a mountain. The other was an Indian, a clean-cut warrior of thirty, muscular and soft-stepping. His features were slightly Mongoloid; his color a clear copper with undertone of red. He wore the head-dress and trouser trimmings of a sub-chief of the Bad People.

They ascended the slope until they were a few paces above the inscription slab, before they stopped, turned and gazed at it. The white man pointed a forefinger at the legend and addressed his companion.

"We stop here," he said in the language of the sub-chief. "This is what I brought you to see, Moose Nose."

"We go no farther?" asked the Indian, surprised.

"Our trails part here. You will go back to your warriors; I to the Fort."

The Indian looked long at the roughly cut symbols, his features set and expressionless. After he had glanced across the lettering from left to right and back again, he asked without a show of interest, almost in tone of disappointment:

"What does it say? This marks the death of what warrior of the whites? How can this, as you told me yesterday, mean life or death to me?"

"I will answer your questions in their

season, which will be before the sun leaves the top of Blanc Toujours," returned the white man. "Then the lettering will mean more to you."

He took the Indian by the arm and led him a dozen steps along the slope where, in the shelter of a huge hillside boulder, were a clump of the paunrat-berry and a rock cairn. They sat down facing each other across the mound.

"More than a year ago," the white man began slowly, "my brother, who was as young as you and a warrior I was proud to call blood-brother, left the fort on the big river. Two men had come in from the brush and whispered to him about the color of gold in the hills to the west. They had no money to buy rifles and food and things to dig with. Against my counsel my brother gave them money and came up the river with them. He told me he would be back before the big snows. He did not come."

"Men who dig in the streams forget home and promise," said the Indian.

"All Winter I waited," the white man went on. "Then in *wipish pishio*—the Moon of the Leaf—I left my work and started up this river to search for my brother and his partners. I found their old camps and the holes they had dug in the gravel for yellow dust. But where the river forks three pipes down the stream, I lost their trail. Not even the eyes of Moose Nose can track a canoe on the water.

"During *opum pishio*—the Moon of Flight—I searched among the hills to the west. By chance, one evening I came suddenly across my brother's partners, living like musquash in a cave by a little creek. They are yonder now."

He raised his arm and pointed west toward a range of hills twenty miles away, where a blue V-cleft showed a river cutting through the range.

"And your brother?" asked the Indian.

"I looked for him, but he was not there. I asked men Galibois and Molony where they had left my brother. With tears in their eyes they told me he was dead."

Moose-Nose ejaculated "Ugh!" in surprise.

A look of sympathy, brief but sincere, flitted across his coppery features.

"I asked men Galibois and Molony how he died," continued the white man in steady tones. "They told me he had gone up a different river from theirs one day and they

found him drifting down on the water, dead in his canoe."

"How did they say your brother died?"

"By the hand of Moose Nose and his warriors, the Jumping Salmon."

With a startled yell of astonishment the sub-chief leaped to his feet. He grasped his rifle leaning against the mound, but as quickly threw it down again and flashed a copper knife from his belt.

"Thou art a liar!" he cried, quivering with anger. "Thou hast no rifle, but a knife. Fight!"

The white man did not make a motion to rise. He sat quiet, looking straight into the eyes of the Indian whose quick rage was paralyzed by the deliberate calmness of the other.

"Sit down," he commanded. "Sit down and wait till the arrow is drawn to the head. Did I say to you that I believed the tale of men Galibois and Molony? Did I say: 'Moose Nose, thou hast killed my brother, and I shall kill thee beside his grave?' No!"

The Indian gave a startled look at the mound, and as comprehension broke upon him he shrank back from the stones.

"Your brother sleeps here?" he burst out. "At our feet?"

The white man nodded.

"His spirit has passed and can do you no harm. Sit down while I finish. It will soon be dark and I have something yet to do.

"I did not take the word of men Galibois and Molony. I remembered that you had talked with my brother in the hills to the north and exchanged presents with him. Though they tried to hide it from me, I was quick to see that men Galibois and Molony were digging their fortunes out of the peagravel beneath their cave. They would say little about my brother's death until I loosened their tongues with conversation water. Then they told me that he was buried here."

The white man wetted his lips, and his features twitched, but he continued his even story:

"The Jumping Salmon have done many evil things, but I did not believe that Moose Nose would kill the brother of his friend. The eyes of men Galibois and Molony looked into the bushes when they told me that the Jumping Salmon had killed him. When I left the cave the next morning I threw my long rifle into the river, for the

sear-bolt had lost out during the night and the rifle was useless."

"How did it come that you left the cave?" asked the sub-chief.

The white man smiled grimly.

"In my talk I said twice that every one at the fort knew I had come up the river to search for my brother; and that every one knew the Jumping Salmon were my friends. *That* is why I left the cave. I did not go back to the fort, as I said to them I would; but circled and came here, and dug."

With instinctive feeling the Indian looked away until the white man had composed himself and spoke on—more rapidly and with vehemence.

"The bullet that struck my brother in the back was such a bullet as would fit the rifles of men Galibois and Molony. And it was notched, as no Jumping Salmon knows how. But still I was not sure. I did not take the word of the bullet. The Indians might have had such rifles. From here I went north across the mountains to my friends, the Fox-brush people. I asked them, 'Last year when the burnished Moon of Flight was waning, where were the Jumping Salmon, the warriors of Moose Nose?'"

"But first you came to our camp and spoke softly to many of us," interposed the sub-chief quickly.

"But I did not take your word," the white man replied evenly. "The Fox-brush people spoke without looking into the bushes. They told me that the Jumping Salmon had passed their camp at the beginning of the Moon of Flight; had speared caribou in the lakes north of the mountains; and had not returned till the Moon of Hoar Frost, when the caribou horns harden. So I knew that Moose Nose and his warriors were not guilty."

Relief, sharp and quick, spread over the countenance of the sub-chief. He flung his knife on the ground impetuously, as if in contrition for his hastiness in drawing it. The white man rose to his feet.

"And you came again to our camp, as a friend," the Indian prompted.

"As a friend," the white man echoed. "And to bring you here to the grave of my brother."

"But why?"

"We will read the lettering."

They stepped back to the lob-stick. The white man spelt out the words slowly, that

the sub-chief might understand the English.

"Pierce McLeon killed August 15, 1920, by the Jumping Salmon."

The sub-chief snorted in surprise, like a hit buck. His rage was wordless. He stood like a statue of wrath, his thin nostrils quivering. McLeon repeated the words.

"Liars!" Moose Nose hissed. "Liars in big letters, and murderers of their partner!"

They stood a moment in silence broken only by the flurried breathing of the Indian and the wilderness note of a red-throated loon down the river.

"You are shrewd, Moose Nose," McLeon said at length. "Do you know why I visited your camp a second time, and brought you here with me?"

"How do I know the lettering is what you had said?" the Indian demanded.

"You can copy it on bark and show it to the first white man you meet," McLeon returned. "But that would be a great mistake for you to make. Word would get to the fort that the Jumping Salmon, according to the letters, killed my brother. You, Moose Nose, would be visited by the short carbines that ask no questions, but shoot straight. They know that the Jumping Salmon have not been guiltless in the past. They would not seek out the truth as I have done. They would not take the word of your whole tribe against the word of the slab and the words of men Galibois and Molony."

The sub-chief suddenly started to climb the lob-stick to pull down the slab, but McLeon stopped him.

"I will see to that," he promised. "But I have no rifle nor belt-gun. I can not stop the tongues of men Galibois and Molony, or I would already have done so. They are watching for me with rifles. When they dig out all the dust and go in to the fort, they will say that the Jumping Salmon killed their partner. Then you can expect a visit from the short carbines. Your squaw-woman and papooses will wonder who is going to feed them."

Emotions violent and uncontrollable swept over the Indian's face like choppy gusts across a lake. Anger crowded out the others as he continued to stare at the inscription slab. McLeon watched him keenly. When he saw the anger fade and the features of the sub-chief set in a grim intent, he judged it time to speak again.

"They will soon finish their work in the gravel and will get back to the fort before the Moon of Snow. Word of how the Jumping Salmon killed my brother must not get to the fort."

The Indian's eyes went past the slab to the blue cleft in the hills to the west. McLeon waited for him to speak.

"You came as a friend," he said slowly. "Until now I did not know what the words meant. You will take my canoe and travel swiftly down the river to the fort. You will tell the short carbines that at the fork of the rivers all trace of those you came to find was blotted out. I—" he motioned to

the north—"will go to join the Jumping Salmon."

Without another word Moose Nose reached out his hand. McLeon grasped it firmly. In a moment the Indian had vanished in the gloom of the river spruce.

"The —— his dues!" McLeon burst out savagely, when the Indian was quite gone.

He scaled the lob-stick to the slab. Light was failing him, so that he had to work swiftly. First he hewed off the lettering until only the name of his brother remained. Then, carefully and plainly, he cut the names of Galibois and Molony deep into the wood.